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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000751

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LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: NIGHTCLUB GOERS ARRESTED DURING ROUNDUPS IN ASMARA

REF: ASMARA 694

Classified By: CDA Jennifer McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: While few would describe Asmara as the dance hotspot of the Horn of Africa, many club goers may have wished they stayed home during the weekend of September 16. Eritrean authorities conducted simultaneous late-night raids in the nightclubs throughout town as part of what appears to be roundups seeking draft dodgers. Eritrean authorities detained over 2000 people over the weekend. With a lack of government transparency, having a complete understanding of the motivations behind the roundups is difficult; the weekend's roundups may signal a turn to regular and more harsh roundups or may just be an upswing in an established cyclical pattern. End Summary.

ERITREAN TWO-STEP: DANCE & ARREST, DANCE & ARREST

12. (U) According to one eyewitness at the Warsa club(which is owned by the Canadian Honorary Consul), the police surrounded the club, entered, instructed the staff to turn off the music and began checking IDs. They reportedly worked through the crowd two or three times, arresting specific men and women in the crowd. Then, evidently abandoning this strategy, police arrested everyone in the club approximately 250 individuals. Using sticks and threats to keep the crowd quiet and in line, the police forcibly marched these individuals for about 1/2 kilometer, including Italian, German and Dutch dual nationals, to Police Station No. 5.

13. (U) An Eritrean who witnessed the roundups at Mocumbo, a club in downtown Asmara, said it felt as if there were a police officer for every person in the club. The police surrounded the dance floor within the club and the streets were closed off in a block radius around the club. He managed to get out and head accross town to the Expo fairgrounds where a number of other nightclubs operate. Upon arriving at the Expo, he observed the police had completely surrounded the fairgrounds. At that point he decided to go home. He too explained that the police took everyone from the clubs to Police Station No. 5.

14. (U) At the police station, one detainee Eritrean observed nearly 2000 detainees who had been picked up at clubs such as the I-bar and Mocumbo. The male detainees were put in 8x8 cells, with at least 16 to a cell. Lacking enough cell

space, the women were forced to sleep outside in the center courtyard without shelter. There were rumors that some police officers sexually harassed the women in custody. While some detainees reportedly were released during the following two days, post has been unable to obtain reliable information on how many were released, how many transferred to other facilities and how many remain at the police station.

¶15. (U) Day-time round-ups also occurred during the weekend in Asmara. Police surrounded a meat market and hauled in at least 2 truckloads of individuals, approximately 150-200 people. These individuals were reportedly taken to a local prison, Adi Abeito.

REPORTS FROM PRIOR ROUNDUPS

¶16. (C) Reports from the roundups of a few weeks ago continue as individuals released share their stories (Reftel). A US Embassy guard was detained on August 29. While on his way to the store, he witnessed a large gathering of people and inquired as to what was going on. He was told by an onlooker that, during a roundup, some young men had fought back and beaten up some of the police. The guard responded that it served the police right. Unfortunately a nearby plainclothes police man overheard his comment and arrested him. He was released two days later.

¶17. (C) A household staff member of a U.S. Embassy employee experienced beatings at the hands of the police during his detainment the weekend of August 26. The individual, a former member of the Eritrean Air Force who was officially demobilized from military service and in possession of a release card, he tried, while detained, to unsuccessfully to argue his case. He was officially released from detention after several days upon presenting a letter from the Air Force supporting his claim to demobilization.

THE POLICE AND THE DETAINEES: WHO ARE THEY?

¶18. (C) Most of the police conducting the round-ups in Asmara are uneducated Eritreans, predominantly from the Naru tribe in western Eritrea. Often very poor, these men are usually illiterate and just glad to have a roof over their head, a hot meal and a small income. Playing on long-standing ethnic tensions between the poorer and more isolated tribes of the west and the more privileged and urban Tigrinya ethnic group, the GSE encourages the Naru during roundups to aggressively approach the Asmarinos, many of whom are Tigrinyan. While they have reportedly been told not to shoot, the police have brutally beaten detainees during round-ups. An Eritrean recently told the RSO that the "don,t shoot" command is common knowledge around town and many individuals are now fleeing from the police during roundups.

¶19. (C) Comment: This weekend's roundups were the largest and most coordinated government effort to crack down on draft dodgers since November 2005. An unprecedented number of individuals were detained, including women in significant numbers. Post is hearing anecdotally that more and more people are trying to avoid national service and attempting to depart the country. As the GSE seems to be conducting these large-scale round-ups primarily in Asmara, post believes the GSE has focused its efforts on controlling the more educated, youthful population of Eritrea,s main urban area -- i.e. the population most likely to express disenchantment with the regime. If individuals continue to run from the police, post wonders whether the "don,t shoot" order will remain in place. Treatment of detainees during the roundups is already severe; post foresees potentially greater violence if the government continues its stepped-up tactics. End Comment.

MCINTYRE